THE DIGITAL FREEDOM INITIATIVE

Public/Private Sector Roundtable
February 20, 2007

Overview and Summary of the Event

A. Objectives of the DFI Public/Private Sector Roundtable

The President's Digital Freedom Initiative (DFI) aims to harness the strengths of the U.S. public and private sectors to help the developing world utilize information and communication technologies (ICTs) to resolve development challenges. The initiative involves multiple federal agencies, the private sector, non-profit organizations, and universities.

The DFI convened a Public/Private Sector Roundtable on February 20, 2007 to provide a forum for the U.S. Government, private, academic and NGO participants to exchange views and ideas on how best to work together to achieve the goal for DFI in 2007 of using ICTs to support economic, social and political development.

B. Roundtable Participants

The DFI Public/Private Sector Roundtable brought together more than 150 participants from the U.S. Government, the private sector, foreign embassies, as well as other organizations involved in the implementation of ICT-related development activities.

C. Opening Remarks

Ambassador David A. Gross, the U.S. Coordinator for International Communication and Information Policy, and Juan Belt, the Director of USAID's Office of Infrastructure and Engineering, Bureau for Economic Growth, Agriculture and Trade, opened the conference.

Ambassador Gross said the meeting was a first step in a series of formal and informal outreach by the USGs to set the objectives for DFI in 2007. He emphasized that the U.S. Government team, including State, USAID, Commerce, Peace Corps, SBA and others, hoped to hear from the private sector on specific opportunities for intervention, and in particular specific regions or countries where well-designed activities could have a significant impact.

Juan Belt stated that USAID was working closely with Ambassador Gross and his team on issues related to ICT for development. USAID's efforts have focused on policy and regulatory reforms as well as technology and connectivity deployments. The Last Mile Initiative (LMI), for instance, has projects in more than 25 countries, including the extremely successful Macedonia Connects project. Mr. Belt noted that almost all LMIs include strong partnerships with private

US firms, and that we welcome similar partnerships under the DFI. Mr. Belt emphasized USAID's commitment to seeking partnerships with the private sector and others under DFI.

D. Moderated Open Discussion

Paul Margie, Senior Director for Technology Partnerships at the United Nations Foundation, moderated an open discussion regarding focus areas for DFI in 2007. The following themes emerged from the discussion:

1. Policy Advocacy Tasks
- Telecom policy advocacy with ministries and regulators on how changes can be made
- Non telecom policy advocacy (tax)
- Demonstrating how advances in telecom are related to other sectors
- Symbiosis between government and trade

2. Information Resource and Knowledge Bank
- Share or create best practices, specifically on sustainability: identify ways to move from pilot programs to self-sustainable projects
- Creating a framework for ICT programs that includes all key elements
- Information for local governments to increase capacity
- DFI as a forum for discussion

3. Brokering Function
- Connect ICT projects in the field with the State Department, USAID, PEPFAR, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and other U.S. government agencies
- Collect information on various pilot programs and long-term sustainable projects
- Link program to universities as well as other organizations, such as SMEs and the Diaspora community, active in using ICT for development

4. Practical Help
- Access to local partners, picking the right local partners
- Getting equipment through customs
- Dealing with retention of staff once trained

5. Market Segmentation and Regional Differentiation
- Identify regions and countries where opportunities exist for initiatives that will have a significant impact on economic development. Specific ICT interventions in least developed countries - interventions that can make the most of one connectivity point and have a multiplier effect

- From a policy and regulatory perspective, look at regional and country differences based on the facts of the market rather than trying to apply blanket best practices across regions. For example, participants mentioned:
    - Latin America is relatively well-connected, but there are pockets of countries in Central America and elsewhere on the continent that are not
    - The Middle East would benefit from support in moving towards greater freedom of markets and information dissemination

o Countries such as India may also have a lot to offer from their experience in the context of regional or global partnerships

6. Additional Recommendations from Participants
- Partnerships are difficult to establish and nurture, but they are worth the effort. Investments of time and direct personal contact are essential. Successful partnerships also require that partners understand each other's perspectives and modus operandi
- Work with universities and other institutions that may have extensive access to expertise, local knowledge, and offer a neutral perception/stance
- DFI should develop a framework to help potential partners in the private sector understand and see where different programs fit in
- Look at existing ICT-related tools (such as the Handle system) to see if they may have applications in ongoing or future initiatives
- Do not forget content. Real development impact, especially in least developed countries, often comes from the relevance of the content to the immediate needs of the population
- Support small companies that work to develop low-cost technologies and other products appropriate for developing countries
- Work with and through the Diasporas of various developing countries
- Participate in upcoming events organized or supported by U.S. Government agencies

E. Closing Remarks
Ambassador Gross thanked everyone for participating and Paul Margie for facilitating the session and synthesizing the discussions. He hoped the meeting would mark the beginning of ongoing discussions, and noted that a summary would be published on the DFI website at http://www.dfi.gov. Ambassador Gross also encouraged participants to take the survey on the website and to review the calendar of upcoming events on the site.